OPINION

BY F.S. AIJAZUDDIN

Slow descents

IT used to be the Tower of London. Those who forfeited the favour of the king would be sent there for incarceration, even execution. Today, it is the Sandringham estate. Mr Andrew Mountbatten Windsor has been banished there by his elder brother King Charles III, following serious charges of sexual abuse against the former prince, who was recently stripped of his royal and military titles.

While archaic tradition continues in the United Kingdom — prisoners are detained still 'at His Majesty's pleasure' — decapitation is no longer a royal prerogative. Famously, Queen Elizabeth I once threatened contrary councillors: "I will make you shorter by the head." To preserve his own head and his crown, Charles has done the next best thing: he has amputated a diseased limb.

The British royal family, like the Roman Catholic church, needs to survive to thrive. Over the centuries, it has committed many acts of self-preservation. For example, it changed its dynastic DNA: the House of Stuart (a Frenchified adaptation of the Scottish clan-name Stewart) was followed by five German Hanoverians, then three monarchs from the House of Saxe-Coburg Gotha, until 1917, when, well into the First World War against Germany, George V renamed it the House of Windsor.

In 1960, Queen Elizabeth II succumbed to pressure from her once Greek husband and his ambitious uncle Lord Louis Mountbatten (formerly Battenberg). She changed her family name to the House of Mountbatten-Windsor. The dynastic name of Windsor though remains for those descended directly from her and Philip.

Over the years, the Royal Family has learned to shed itself of deadwood. It saw off the Duke of Windsor (who died an exile in France), Group Capt Townsend (Princess Margaret's suitor who was posted to Brussels as Britain's air attach), Diana, Princess of Wales (who died in Paris with her Egyptian paramour 'Dodi' Fayed), a disgruntled Harry, Duke of Sussex and his American duchess to the US, and now Andrew and his wild ex-wife Sarah Ferguson.

Charles III needed to act before parliament did, aware that his namesake Charles I was executed by parliamentarians. (Oliver Cromwell dismissed that king's beheading as "a cruel necessity".)

Another 'cruel necessity' occurred in 1918, when King George V, prompted by his demi-German wife Queen Mary, left his Russian cousin Tsar Nicholas II and his family to their fate. Buckingham Palace feared "an internal revolt and public outcry". George, however, at the insistence of his mother Queen Alexandra, sent *H.M.S.Marlborough* to rescue her sister (his aunt) the former tsarina, Marie Feodorovna.

Interestingly, the Romanovs — now safely dead — are back in fashion. Tsar Nicholas II and his family have been canonised as 'new martyrs' by the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad and as 'passion bearers' by the Moscow Patriarchate. With the Kremlin's approval, the remains of Marie Feodorovna were retrieved from her native Denmark and interred in the cathedral of St Peter and St Paul in St Petersburg.

Other dislodged royalty has not been so lucky. The last imperial Romanov Grand Duchess Olga died in east Toronto (Canada). The former King Constantine of Greece spent his exile in London before returning to die in Athens. His brother-in-law — the former King of Spain Juan Carlos — abdicated in 2014 in favour of his son Felipe. His reason? He did not want his son "to wither waiting like Prince Charles".

> British royals have routinely acted to guard their own interests.

A deeper cause lay in Juan Carlos' dodgy financial dealings and extra-marital escapades. His alleged mistress Corinna zu Sayn-Wittgenstein-Sayn claimed that Juan Carlos had received kickbacks from commercial deals from Gulf rulers, in particular the 6.7 billion Haramain high-speed railway in Saudi Arabia. She revealed that he had purchased a number of properties in her name, "[not] because he [loved] me a lot, but because I reside in Monaco". He himself now lives in the UAE.

Power, Henry Kissinger once said, is a powerful aphrodisiac. That explains the Marilyn Monroe liaison with both the Kennedy brothers (JFK & RFK), the Bill Clinton/ Monica Lewinsky indiscretion, Trump's indulgences, and other high-profile scandals, that are routinely denied. In such cases, one is reminded of the response by the 'model' Mandy Rice-Davies during the Profumo scandal of the 1960s. A lawyer told Rice-Davies that Lord Astor denied having an affair with her. Her tart reply was: "Well, he would, wouldn't he?" That retort has since been enshrined in the *Oxford Dictionary of Quotations*. In her own words, Mandy's subsequent life became, not unlike the former prince's, "one slow descent into respectability". ■

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BY MISHAL SAMEER KHAN

Time bomb

HEADLINES around the world recently reported the deaths of at least 20 children under the age of six in India. Their young kidneys had failed after the children consumed cough syrup containing high levels of a toxic chemical. The images of parents carrying the limp bodies of their children, who were killed instead of healed by the medicine, were heartbreaking. These headlines and images could easily have come from Pakistan.

Pakistan has been fortunate to have avoided a healthcare-related tragedy of this scale in recent months, but the risks are real and persistent. We had a massive number of deaths — over 200 — from contaminated cardiac medicines in Punjab, and thousands of children have been infected with HIV in Sindh from contaminated syringes and drips.

The situation in India must propel us towards action on strengthening our drug regulatory system, as it demonstrates that the cost of inaction is high for everyone. We know that patients suffer when unsafe medicines reach the market. But weak regulation also hurts doctors, pharmaceutical companies and regulatory bodies.

In India, the doctor who prescribed the contaminated syrup has been arrested. This shows that doctors can easily get caught in a web of legal and ethical scrutiny, even if they are unaware of the quality issues with the medicines they are using. There is growing public awareness and concern about doctors prioritising kickbacks from pharmaceutical companies over medicine quality. A large study found that approximately 40 per cent of doctors in Karachi agreed to receive payments or other gifts in return for prescribing medicines from a fake pharmaceutical company without checking the company's registration, manufacturing standards, or medicine quality.

Pharmaceutical companies, too, have much to lose. News of harm to patients from a single poor quality product can tarnish the reputation of the entire industry. With the Pakistani industry looking to export medicines, a story of deaths from unsafe medicine would be a huge blow to the confidence that Pakistanis are safe.

Finally, we should learn from the impact on the global reputation of India's drug regulator. The WHO has raised "deep concern" over gaps in India's drug regulations. Previous issues in drug regulation in India have led to a book with a shaming title: *The Truth Pill: The Myth of Drug Regulation in India*. The Drug Regulatory Authority of Pakistan has been working to strengthen the regulation of medicine quality, with a series of recently reported actions. But small positive steps by Drap will quickly be forgotten if there is a similar cluster of deaths from unsafe medicines in Pakistan. We are sitting on a time bomb and we need to accelerate progress on strengthening our health regulators.

It is not a simple task, but it is an essential one. To start, there must be regular and transparent assessments of how well our health regulators — such as Drap, the Pakistan Medical and Dental Council and the provincial healthcare commissions — are functioning. What actions have they taken each year to protect patients? Are they adequately resourced to do so? How should they be supported to function better? We simply do not know. The WHO has provided a 'Global Benchmarking Tool' for drug regulators and Drap should use that to formulate an institutional development strategy rooted in identified strengths and areas for improvement.

The unfortunate reality is that many of these institutions are often under-resourced and inappropriately staffed due to political appointments or interference. When technical expertise is replaced with patronage, the consequences are grave. Insufficient human and other resources results in weak implementation. In Pakistan and India, we know that inspections are irregular, and regulators tend to act only after a crisis occurs rather than conduct regular compliance checks — which should be at the core of their mandate.

> Progress on strengthening our health regulators must be fast-tracked.

Compounding this is the near absence of reliable health data systems for regulators to use for monitoring. Pakistan urgently needs electronic prescription records and systems to monitor drug reactions. Without these, widespread unsafe prescribing practices and poor quality medicines will continue.

The problem is not only weak oversight of pharmaceutical products. Our entire system of health regulation needs to be strengthened to ensure the safety and quality of the care we receive. Regulators must be empowered to act independently, insulated from political and commercial pressures, and then held to account. The recent tragedy in India should serve as a wake-up call. If we do not act now, the next set of headlines about deaths from healthcare could be about Pakistan. ■

The writer is a health policy and systems-strengthening expert and professor at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, UK.

FROM THE PAST PAGES OF DAWN

1975 | Fifty years ago

Khondkar quits

NEW DELHI: Bangladesh President Khondkar Mushtaq Ahmed resigned as head of state early this morning [Nov 5] following the ouster of junior army officers who had installed him three months ago. Radio Bangladesh announced Mushtaq Ahmed's decision to step down. The Radio said Supreme Court Chief Justice A.M. Sayem would be sworn in as the new President. ... Shortly before resigning, Khondkar promulgated an executive order enabling him to designate his successor. ... Western diplomatic sources here said that reports from Dacca indicated a 10-man military-dominated National Council might be named to rule … with the President the nominal chairman. — News agencies

[Meanwhile, as reported by news agencies from Islamabad,] the Opposition members of the National Assembly, including four members who recently resigned from the Government party ... staged a walkout against what the Leader of the Opposition described as 'indifferent attitude of the Treasury benches'. Before staging the walkout … Maulana Mufti Mahmud took exception to … remarks of the Prime Minister when he said that Maulana Sahib could meet him in his chamber and that "shampoo could be imported from London".

1950 | Seventy-five years ago

Coup reported in Lhasa

NEW DELHI: Reports reaching here from Tibet today [Nov 5] said that 16-year-old Dalai Lama, spiritual and temporal head of Tibet, has been captured by pro-Communist Tibetans in his flight from Lhasa. These followed an earlier report that pro-Communist Tibetans led by two leftist monks had seized control of Government at Lhasa and intended to hand it over to the Central Chinese Peoples Republic armies marching on the capital.

The report said that there was some opposition to the pro-Communist coup d'etat but it was quickly put down. A Kalimpong message says that conditions in Lhasa have now returned to normal. The new group in power now is said to have embarked upon a programme of social and agrarian reforms.

Reports reaching New Delhi newspapers said that followers of Panchan Lama Communist-backed "rival" spiritual leader prepared an ambush at towns of Gyantse and Shigatse on banks of Brahmaputra river. These reports are not confirmed, but they strongly indicated that pro-Communist elements in Tibet were hoping to end the fighting soon by seizing Government and turning it over to the invaders. — News agencies

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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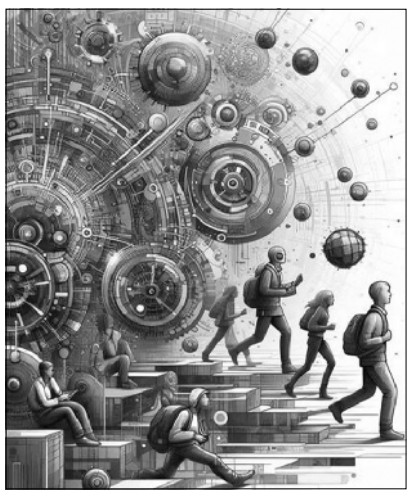
Letters may be edited for purposes of clarity and space. All letters should carry the writer's address, CNIC and phone numbers.

Seriously misplaced obsession with CSS



WHILE youth across the globe prepare for the age of artificial intelligence (AI), entrepreneurship and space exploration, Pakistan's brightest minds remain fixated on the Central Superior Services (CSS) and Provincial Management Service (PMS) exams. This paradox is not simply misplaced ambition; it reflects deeper structural failures — an education system that rewards rote learning over creativity, a society that mistakes authority for success, and a nation reluctant to embrace the demands of the 21st century.

The developed world continues to advance because it has quickly adapted to changing realities. Its education systems foster creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving. Youth are trained to question and innovate — skills that drive start-ups, breakthroughs, and technological revolutions.

The rise of AI has reshaped labour markets, making adaptability the new currency. Pakistan, however, remains trapped in a colonial mindset. What explains this unrelenting thirst for CSS? Ask aspirants or their self-styled mentors, and the answers converge on a misplaced sense of authority, social prestige and the lure of privileges.

The obsession, however, is historical. Colonial rulers built a bureaucracy that embodied power and status — a mindset still alive today. As historian Ayesha Jalal notes, Pakistan has struggled to break free of its colonial institutional legacies, and the civil service remains one of the clearest examples. For many families, success is synonymous with joining the bureaucratic elite.

In a country with high unemployment and weak private-sector growth, civil service promises job security, income and admiration that other professions cannot match. With little support for innovation or research, CSS remains the default 'respectable' path, while entrepreneurship, creativity and teaching are undervalued.

The exam itself reinforces the problem. Structured around memory tests and the regurgitation of official narratives, CSS leaves little room for questioning and critical analysis. Ironically, despite rewarding conformity over creativity, it has a notoriously low pass rate — often below two per cent. Thousands of young Pakistanis spend years preparing, only to end up disillusioned when they fail. Many eventually leave the country, contributing to Pakistan's brain drain.

Meanwhile, the very structure of bureaucracy is under strain. Designed for governance in the mid-20th century, it is ill-equipped to address the challenges of the 21st. Attracting the brightest minds into this outdated system will not solve Pakistan's governance crisis; in fact, it risks reinforcing it.

Consider the contrast: while India is nurturing a start-up ecosystem worth billions, China is investing heavily in AI, and Bangladesh is expanding its tech exports, Pakistan is still channelling its talent into a civil service model inherited from the British Raj.

The so-called mentors and academies, thriving on desperation, exploit aspirants by selling plagiarised notes, ready-made books, and false promises of success. This CSS industry, built on dreams of authority, reinforces illusions of prestige rather than preparing students for modern realities. It has become a business of selling hope, not building futures. Dismantling this delusion requires more than cosmetic reforms.

Pakistan must redesign its education system and curriculum to match the demands of modern world. What the country needs is an ecosystem that values innovation. Pakistan's future will not be built by recycling colonial dreams, but by empowering its youth to imagine, innovate and lead. Until society values thinkers, builders and creators as much as bureaucrats, the country will remain trapped in the past as the world moves ahead.

Zakir Ullah
Islamabad

So-called brothers

EARLIER this year when the nation was celebrating its Independence Day, with people having adorned their homes and rooftops with flags and buntings, and with children carrying national flags and singing songs, children of an Afghan family living opposite my home, suddenly took everyone by surprise by shouting obscenities from atop the roof of their house, telling people that they would soon take off Pakistan's flag and hoist the flag of Afghanistan.

My mother used to say that if the children of a family respect you, it means their elders value you. The meaning of these wise words became crystal clear in my mind that day. The Afghan children's disrespectful behaviour towards our national flag was only a projection of their elders' disregard towards our country.

We have been offering hospitality to Afghan refugees for the last several decades, but it appears that we were not quite doing the right thing. I remember that in the 1990s, Afghan refugees started smuggling narcotics and illegal weapons through their respective camps in the outskirts. Many of them were involved in killings. We provided them our land for cultivation and to earn a living, but they dumped our wells with filthy materials as they headed back to their country.

They lived in Pakistan, but their hatred towards our country was quite visible. We stood with the Afghans and called them brothers when no one supported them. We provided them shelters when they had no space to live, and food when there was famine. But they bit us like only they could.

Waqas Ali
Mansehra

Failed talks

HAD it not been for the active role of the mediators, the recently held talks between Pakistan and the Afghan Taliban in Istanbul would have failed. Even after the last-minute breakthrough, the agreement, at best, is tentative, and things may well go down south in a hurry.

Despite Pakistan's presentation of credible evidence demonstrating that Afghan soil is being used for cross-border terrorism, the Taliban delegation refrained from providing a written assurance to prevent their territory from serving as a sanctuary for terrorist outfits. Their reluctance to provide such guarantees may stem from internal divisions within the Taliban ranks, particularly between the Haqqani Network and the Kabul-based leadership, as well as their limited capacity to control militant groups operating autonomously within Afghanistan.

Additionally, geopolitical dynamics cannot be ignored. India's engagement with Kabul has raised concerns in Islamabad about New Delhi's covert role in supporting cross-border attacks. Should diplomatic efforts fail, not only will Pakistan likely to face heightened insecurity and instability, but the entire region will also bear the brunt of increasing cross-border terrorism.

It is imperative for the Afghan Taliban to curb external interference, foster unity among their factions, and take decisive action against terrorist organisations using Afghan territory as a base for operations.

Doing so would not only demonstrate a commitment to regional peace and stability, but also fulfil one of the key assurances the Taliban made under the Doha Peace Agreement of 2021 to prevent the use of Afghan soil for terrorism.

Aftab Ahmed Bhatti
Jacobabad

Weakening passport

FOR the fifth consecutive year, the Pakistani passport has remained among the world's weakest on the Henley Passport Index 2025, with visa-free access limited to just 31 destinations. This persistent stagnation reflects the deeper reality of diplomatic inertia, domestic instability, and eroding global trust. Despite the introduction of e-passports and digital systems, Pakistan's global mobility remains constrained, mirroring its limited geopolitical outreach and underutilised soft power.

In contrast, China's passport — ranked 94th in 2015 — has climbed to 64th through strategic diplomacy, trade expansion, and consistent global engagement. Pakistan, meanwhile, remains a victim of

security-centric narratives and missed opportunities.

Frequent political upheavals, poor governance and economic uncertainty have reinforced the perception of risk, discouraging other nations from offering visa relaxations. While technological reforms have improved passport credibility, they cannot replace the strategic confidence-building needed to reshape Pakistan's international image.

To break this cycle, Pakistan must pursue a comprehensive mobility strategy that merges diplomacy, economy and perception. Expanding bilateral ties, easing visa regimes, and fostering reciprocity can create goodwill and trust. Economic diplomacy and soft power projection — through culture, education and its vast diaspora — can help rebuild credibility and influence. Improving the passport's ranking can redefine Pakistan's global identity.

Only through consistent diplomacy, drastic internal reforms and narrative correction can Pakistan move from isolation to integration, transforming the country's passport from a symbol of limitation into one of great possibilities.

Noman Arbab Baloch
Panjgur

▶ **IMPROVING LITERACY:** Lack of literacy is one of the biggest problems in Pakistan. According to 2023 census, 60.8 per cent people were literate, leaving 39.2pc Pakistanis illiterate. A thoughtful solution lies in setting up technical and vocational training institutions that could educate even the adult population. There should be a complete and effective ban on child labour. Their schooling is necessary to ensure fairness in society, and to enable them to have a decent future for themselves, their families and the country.
Ryaan Abdullah Khan
Rawalpindi

▶ **REFORMS NEEDED:** The Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP), while crucial, requires immediate reforms to remain effective. Inflation has drastically reduced the value of its payments, and many deserving families remain excluded due to outdated data. The programme must evolve beyond temporary relief to offer sustainable solutions. People urgently need increased payment amounts tied to inflation, an updated registry of beneficiaries, and the programme's integration with skill-training programmes. These changes would transform BISP from a short-term safety net into a powerful tool for poverty eradication. The government must act to ensure this vital programme truly serves those who need it the most.
Maheera Tariq
Lahore

▶ **NATURALISATION CERTIFICATES:** Pakistani applicants in Ireland awaiting their naturalisation certificates have been facing prolonged delays. During the verification process, the Irish Naturalisation Department often sends requests for ground checks to Pakistan. Unfortunately, these verifications take an unreasonably long time to be completed, resulting in applicants having to wait for years before receiving their naturalisation certificates. This unnecessary delay causes immense hardship to applicants. The relevant ministries in Pakistan should coordinate effectively with their Irish counterparts to ensure that such verifications are processed efficiently and within a reasonable timeframe.
Gul R. Khan
Dublin, Republic of Ireland

External Ombudsman

Veteran journalist Muhammad Ali Siddiqi is *Dawn's* External Ombudsman (DEO). His duty is to attend to our readers' complaints, and to respond to them professionally. DEO is the investigating authority to whom all complaints can be referred, and it is DEO who takes notice of any alleged violations of *Dawn's* code of ethics, and informs the Editor for appropriate action.
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